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## Detroit River gondola ride takes shape

### Firm pitches plan to Detroit, Windsor

May 4, 2001

**BY M. L. ELRICK**

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The first of what could one day be a string of 60 gondola cars spanning the Detroit River arrived at the Renaissance Center this week, signifying a step forward in plans for an aerial link between Detroit and Windsor.

The Swiss-made, eight-passenger gondola car sits packed in a box not far from where it would take off on its 4,000-foot ride across the water, said Niels Jorgensen, president of Skylink International.

Jorgensen said Skylink is negotiating with Detroit and General Motors Corp. on plans to locate one end of the aerial gondola between Ford Auditorium and East Jefferson.

"GM has been very supportive, as the city has, to make it work on this side," Jorgensen said, adding that building a gondola station would not affect Ford Auditorium.

Mayor Dennis Archer, during a discussion on his plan to relocate the MGM Casino to the riverfront, told City Council last month that he hopes the gondola link will be built.

Mayoral spokesman Greg Bowens said the city has been working with Skylink, but would not disclose potential costs or locations for the gondola station. He said the city would not give

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away land and that the City Council must approve any deal.

Jorgensen said both Windsor and Detroit council members have seen a scaled-down model of the project, which could go on display with the gondola car at GM World in the Renaissance Center if negotiations progress. GM has provided Skylink with space to store its model and the gondola car that arrived Tuesday.

Jorgensen said Skylink hopes to lease or buy city land for the gondola station and work out an arrangement with GM to locate the tower supporting the gondola cable on GM property along the riverfront.

But Montreal-based Skylink's plans are bogged down in Windsor over the firm's plan to locate the Canadian station on land owned by Casino Windsor.

Chuck Wills, chief administrative officer for the City of Windsor, said the casino first needs to determine whether it needs the land for planned expansion.

"Until you're able to determine your own needs, it's pretty difficult to enter into discussions over joint use," Wills said.

Anne Rappe, spokeswoman for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., the government agency that owns Casino Windsor, said it will be months before a decision is made on the land's future. She said her agency sees difficulties in locating the gondola station on its land, but did not rule it out.

Jorgensen characterized Canadian negotiations as "tough."

Nevertheless, the project has progressed on the Canadian side.

On Monday, the Windsor City Council gave the city's administration approval to enter into negotiations with Skylink.

Fran Funaro, managing director of Windsor's

City Centre Business Association, said the council's action was an encouraging development.

And Wills said that if negotiations between Skylink and Casino Windsor collapse, there may be alternative sites compatible with a station on Detroit's civic center.

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